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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the performance of students who missed regularly scheduled examinations and took make-up examinations in an upper-level psychology course. Four sections of a 300-level Educational Psychology course enrolled 123 students, of whom 52 missed one or two examinations, one missed four examinations, and one missed the comprehensive final. The examination scores, quiz scores, and finals scores were compared for those students missing examinations and those who did not. Results indicated that students who missed examinations scored lower on their make-up examinations than on their regularly scheduled examinations. These students also had lower quiz and comprehensive final examination scores than students who did not miss regular examinations. Since the make-up examinations were the same as the regularly scheduled examinations, factors other that examination difficulty account for these results. Possible explanations include: students who miss examinations are less capable, have more personal problems, have more absences, are less interested in the subject matter, are more likely to procrastinate, or are less dedicated. (Contains 10 references.) (BF)

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Running Head: MISSED EXAMINATIONS AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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Missed Examinations and Student Performance in an Upper-Level Course

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Abstract

This study investigated the performance of students who missed regularly scheduled examinations and took makeup examinations in an upper-level psychology course. It analyzed how these students performed on makeup examinations, regularly scheduled examinations, quizzes, and comprehensive final examinations. Results indicated that students who missed examinations scored lower on their makeup than their regularly scheduled examinations. These students also had lower examination, quiz, and comprehensive final examination scores than students who did not miss examinations. The inclusion of these findings in instructors' manuals that accompany psychology textbooks was discussed.

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Missed Examinations and Student Performance in an Upper-Level Course

Students often take a makeup examination when they miss a regularly scheduled examination. Instructors' manuals that accompany psychology textbooks often give advice about makeup examinations (Bolt, 1995; Conrad & Rafter, 1991; George, 1994; Goss & Bernstein, 1991; Sandlin & Diaz-Rico, 1995), and books on college teaching (McKeachie, 1986; Prichard & Sawyer, 1994) often address issues related to testing (e. g., administering test, scoring tests, proofreading tests); however, these sources provide little or no information about how students who miss examinations perform on makeup examinations or other evaluation procedures (examinations, quizzes, comprehensive final examinations) typically used in college or university classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to investigate student performance on makeup examinations taken in an upper-level psychology course. It compared students' performance on makeup examinations with their performance on regularly scheduled examinations. In addition, examination, quiz, and comprehensive final examination scores of students who missed examinations were compared to those scores of students who did not miss examinations.

Method

Participants

Participants were 123 students enrolled in four sections of a 300-level Educational Psychology course. Of these students, 52 missed one or two examinations, one missed four examinations, and one missed the comprehensive final. All students who missed exams took makeups. The large percentage of students who took makeup examinations was the result of a liberal makeup policy described below.

Procedure

Students could miss a regularly scheduled examination for any reason. They did not need to provide the instructor with an excuse. All makeup examinations, except for the one missed final given after finals week, were given on the last day class met before final examination week. Makeups were the same regularly scheduled examination the student missed when the examination was originally given to the entire class. For example, if a student missed the third test, their makeup was the identical third test given to the entire class.

Four 50-point multiple-choice examinations, one 55-point multiple-choice comprehensive final, and 12 5-point quizzes were given during the semester. Quizzes were typically unannounced. They took a variety of forms including actual quizzes, opinion on an issue, participation in a class demonstration, etc.

Lecture was the primary teaching method. All students had the same instructor, textbook (Woolfolk, 1995), sequence of chapters and lectures, examinations, lecture material, etc. Since live lectures were given, some variation in the presentation of lecture material occurred.

Results

A *t* test for correlated observations compared the makeup examination scores with the mean of the regularly scheduled examination scores for the 52 students who missed one or two examinations. The results indicated that regularly scheduled examination scores (M = 60.71%, SD = 17.59) were significantly higher than makeup examination scores (M = 57.54%, SD = 19.75, $t(51) = 2.05$, $p < .05$). Students scored better on their regularly scheduled than their makeup examinations.

The examination scores, quiz scores, and comprehensive final examination scores of students who missed examinations were compared to the examination, quiz, and comprehensive final examination scores of

students who did not miss examinations using *t* tests for independent observations. These *t* tests indicated that students who did not miss examinations had higher examination scores (M = 135.01, SD = 20.40, $t(121) = 2.20$, $p < .05$), quiz scores (M = 49.15, SD = 8.82, $t(121) = 3.34$, $p < .05$), and final examination scores (M = 36.52, SD = 6.71, $t(121) = 2.45$, $p < .05$) than students who missed examinations and had to take a makeup examination (M = 126.94, SD = 20.02; M = 42.80, SD = 12.25; M = 33.65, SD = 6.13, respectively for examination, quiz, and final examination scores). Students who did not miss examinations performed better on all forms of evaluation than students who missed examinations.

A *t* test comparing the number of quizzes that were handed in indicated that students who did not miss examinations handed in more quizzes than those who missed examinations (Ms = 10.14 and 8.80, SDs = 1.71 and 2.44 respectively; $t(121) = 3.60$, $p < .05$). This suggests that students who did not miss examinations attended class more frequently than students who missed examinations.

Discussion

Students scored higher on their regularly scheduled examinations than their makeup examinations. Furthermore, students who did not miss examinations earned higher examination scores, quiz scores, final examination scores, and handed in more quizzes than students who missed examinations. The explanation for these findings is unclear. Since the makeup examinations were the same as the regularly scheduled examinations, factors other than examination difficulty accounted for these results. It may be that students who miss examinations are less capable, have more personal problems, are less interested in the subject matter, are more likely to procrastinate, are less dedicated, etc.

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Students miss class for different reasons (Van Blerkom, 1992); likewise, they miss exams for different reasons.

Until recently (Kahn, 1995), little research has been conducted on the performance of students who miss exams. The findings reported here provide some information about student performance on makeup examinations, and compare the performance of students who miss examinations with those of students who do not miss examinations on a number of typical types of evaluation methods (examinations, quizzes, comprehensive finals) used in college and university classrooms. These findings support the concerns of those instructors who believe that students who miss examinations do poorly on makeup examinations and other types of evaluation methods. The results of this study should be included in instructors' manuals that accompany textbooks used in psychology courses. If this information was available in instructors' manuals, instructors might inform their students about these results to discourage them from missing examinations.

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Author Note

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